



# Attention Autism

Gina Davies



<http://ginadavies.co.uk/>

# Attention Autism

- Offers an 'irresistible invitation to learn'- activities need to be fun!
- Does your activity inspire the children's attention- do they WANT to attend to it?
- These types of activities give us something worth communicating about.
- Activities that are fun and involve laughter (and their learning points) are more easily remembered.

- Children with autism may struggle to develop joint attention and to attend to something jointly with the adult in order to learn from it -We need to be teaching these skills.

Typical methods of teaching:

- Circle time, or teacher talking at the front.
- Working at the desk, worksheets.
- All of these have an expectation to sit and comply, rather than the child wanting to join in – sitting will develop when the child sees something worth sitting for.

# Strengths of ASD

- Memory for
  - Things that interest them
  - Experiences with emotional impact
- Physical and practical (need to practise what they've learned)
- Energy
- Logic, predictability, routine, structure.
- Visual skills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88oPmbEDg-k>



# Attention Autism

- Stage 1- The bucket: Focus
  - Stage 2- The attention builder: Sustain
  - Stage 3- The interactive game: Shift
  - Stage 4- The table activities: Transition
- 
- Children arranged in group and adults amongst them (not behind them!) and acting as models.

# Use of white board

Use pictures to:

- Share the message clearly
- Lower anxiety
- Add structure
- Make it easy to take the risk and
- Drawing encourages attention and gives them time to process. They are trying to work out what you are drawing. Must be visible to the child as you draw.



# Stage 1: The attention bucket



Teaching a child how to focus their attention

The aims are for the child to:

- Focus their attention on the adult led agenda
- Engage their attention with enthusiasm
- Relax and enjoy these times
- To anticipate shared good times.





# Setting up...



- Get the children to sit on chairs/stools/cushions. Ensure feet are firmly on the floor. No tables as these are barriers!
- Supporting adults to sit amongst the children (not behind them) and support children to stay seated throughout the bucket.
- Bucket with a lid- get one item out, close the lid, activate the item make it visually

- Sing at the beginning of the bucket only. The song can be anything, even raps.
- The children do not get a turn with the toys otherwise this shifts the attention and the others will want a turn. Reiterate this is 'Sarah's bucket.'
- Keep the pace quick.
- Adults need to take risks. We will make mistakes but this is ok! This should be modelled to the children e.g. 'I felt a bit scared but its ok I'm going to try'. If we don't feel comfortable then how do we expect the children to. Turn up and keep trying!!
- If you are in the room; you are taking part (with all of the activity).
- It needs to be the whole group together, if one child/adult

# General advice

- This is a learned skill- it does take time to teach!! It may not be easy for the children/staff initially. Perseverance is the key.
- Do not use verbal prompts e.g. 'sitting/looking'. Prompt non verbally
- Make sure you position yourself a good distance from the children as this shows that it is 'your bucket.' Sit even further away if they are an anxious group.
- Put the item in the centre area for whole group to see at the same time- it should be a shared experience.
- Usually movement items are most engaging, things they can watch and track.
- Keep the toys novel and rotate very regularly.
- Do not rush- take your time. Use lots of facial

# The role of the supporting adult

- This is a vital role and involves participation! All supporting adults must be completely on board with the approach to ensure success.
- Their main role is modelling good attention. If the child gets up, the assistant must be boring and bring them back, whilst continuing to look at the activity.
- For those children who will wander, sit them between two adults.
- It's ok for a highly anxious child to sit slightly away from the others. Just remove anything else motivating from the room and ensure the

# Your turn...

You will need (in small groups):

- 1 bucket with lid and contents.
- Take it in turns to be the leading adult.
- Others can be the supporting adults, or watching children.

# Stage 2: The attention builder

- Offer an activity that has a sequence building to a fantastic experience.
- Sustained attention to one activity for a few minutes.
- Need to be creative!!
- It must be:
  - Highly visual activities
  - Highly appealing activities
  - The only thing available
  - Delivered on the adult's terms
  - Make it worth watching



<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=gina%20davies%20autism%20centre>

<https://www.facebook.com/ginadaviesautism/videos/70975>

- Bucket first then attention builder.
- It needs structure- lay out the equipment, do the sequence, pack away the equipment.
- Put the equipment in see through containers to support anticipation.
- Organise everything before you start (do not get up and leave during your activity otherwise it demonstrates getting up and leaving which the children will then do).
- Work from right to left (this will be the child's left to right as in reading).
- Work from top to bottom.
- Make sure everything is visual to the children.
- Stay on task even if interrupted by child/adult, must keep going. (put a do not disturb note on classroom door).
- You need to be convincing that you like what you're doing.
- Keep it simple.
- Check the background- use a white shower curtain as a contrast or black cement mixer.
- Avoid obsessions.
- Go for things children love.
- If it goes wrong don't worry, just keep going, make a joke of it.
- Don't rush the activities.
- Can contain curriculum learning.
- Clearing up is part of the activity!

# Stage 3: Turn taking



- Shifting their attention to their own individual participation and then back to the group.
- Sharing is difficult, it is a complex social skill- Typically developing children will share to please others, to be part of the group, they know there might be a benefit



- Supporting adults always gets a turn first so that the activity can be modelled.
- The leading adult will invite the individual child to the front to have a go at the activity.
- Start by offering the invitation close up to the child, gradually get further away use an open stretched arm.
- Minimise prompting- aim for the child to accept the invitation move to the right place and the reseat themselves independently.
- Avoid predictable patterns of turn taking, you can use it as an

- Remember the child can only process one source of input at a time and this needs to be you and your activity!
- Use random turn taking- need to teach the children that they may not always get a turn. Model the disappointment through the leading adult and supporting adult. Always address the supporting adult so that you don't increase the child's upset e.g. 'Oh I know its disappointing, I really wanted a

# Stage 4: Table activity and transition

- Focusing attention in a group to watch a demonstration (can be a stage 2 activity they then copy)
- Making a transition
- Focusing attention for an individual task
- Returning to the group
- Focus attention for the celebration/review.
- Need a clear route to the table

- Every child and supporting adult has a kit of their own. The kit should be in a box.
- Adult demonstrates activity.
- Supporting adult to take first turn to take kit and go to table as a model.
- Child puts finished work into tray and takes back to leading adult ensuring that everything is tidied up.

# To make this activity harder...

- Start with every child has their own kit with everything they need.
- As a next step, one element is shared e.g. one box of lentils but everyone has their own cup and bottle.
- Finally, activities where all the equipment is shared or used collaboratively. This is

# Attention targets

E.g.

- Attention focused when in a group
- Attention for adult led agenda
- Attention shared with leading adult/supporting adult/peer
- Attention sustained for 2 mins
- Attention sustained for 5-10 mins
- Attention shifted and focused with adult support

# Communication targets

Non verbal/body language signals for:

- Focused attention
- Anticipation
- More/repetition
- Enjoyment

Teaching of understanding in context

- Core vocabulary
- Concepts e.g. colour, shape, length
- Phrases

Expressive opportunities in social contexts

- Vocalisations of anticipation/enjoyment
- Use of single words/symbols to request/comment/for



**Gina Davies**  
AUTISM CENTRE

- [www.ginadavies.co.uk](http://www.ginadavies.co.uk)
- <https://www.facebook.com/ginadaviesautism/>